

Walter Morrison MBE**The Scottish activist who fought against the wrongs in society**

The milieu that was the anti-nuclear Scottish Committee of 100 is no more, its activists having long since adopted other agendas. However, its brief existence will always be associated with the dynamic figure of Walter Morrison, who seemingly at birth had signed up for life as a private extraordinaire in the Awkward Squad.

Morrison, who has died in his eightieth year, fought tirelessly against the wrongs in society, proudly wore the badges of non-violence and socialism, and spoke his mind fearlessly no matter where he was or in whose company.

Angered by the slaughter of Glasgow children in the Clydebank blitz in 1940, the 16-year-old Walter Morrison, a volunteer with the Home Guard, lied about his age and joined the army. He wanted to fight fascism. But, in less than a week, he found little difference between how the government described fascism and the bullying attitudes and practices within the British army. From then on Morrison's war was fought on two fronts. Considered a difficult case, he was shunted from regiment to regiment, from the Royal Scots Guards to the Black Watch, then on to the Parachute Regiment. During a visit by King George VI, the king politely asked him how he was being treated to which the good soldier Morrison replied: 'Terrible.' He was sent to India on the first available troop ship.

Morrison's pacifism grew from his army experiences in India. During the demonstrations which followed the arrest of Gandhi in 1942, he was on internal security duties. Prior to one demonstration the troops were briefed that they would be facing women and

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children protestors. Morrison asked what they would be expected to do if the women and children refused to halt. 'Open fire,' was the curt answer. Walter promptly stood up and said he would be one of the first to open fire; he would personally shoot any soldier who turned their gun on a woman and a child, and he would then shoot the officer who gave the order. His feet scarcely touched the ground on the way to the glasshouse.

Charged with incitement to mutiny, Morrison was placed in solitary confinement and singled out for sadistic treatment by a staff sergeant. He resolved the issue by telling his Medical Officer that unless the NCO changed his ways, he would kill the next man who entered his cell. Morrison was a big and powerful man, and everyone knew he did not make idle threats. Although the staff sergeant backed off and he won his case, he was racked with guilt over the quandry that he would have to keep his word and kill the first person — friend or enemy — who entered his cell. It was that incident which started him on his lifelong commitment to non-violence.

Although charged on a number of occasions with incitement to mutiny, he never faced a full court-martial; his sentences were always confinement to barracks, 30-days loss of pay or downgradement. He ended his army career and returned to Glasgow in 1946, without a war pension. (Walter's army experiences are told in Peter Grafton's book, 'You, you and you — The people out of step with WWII' Pluto, 1981.)

Morrison was heavily involved from the start in the campaign to stop Polaris being based in the Holy Loch. A man of action and a supporter of the Direct Action Committee, he became a leading light of the Scottish Committee of 100 on its formation and was in the thick of

all the demonstrations, sit down protests, vigils, fasts from the day the US nuclear fleet arrived. He was arrested on numerous occasions.

An intuitive publicist and instinctive empiricist, Morrison was always coming up with innovative ideas to attract positive publicity for the cause, and always relating his salutary experiences in his constant struggle against pigheaded authority. His fearlessness subdued people accustomed to deference. He would never walk away from a fight, no matter how unlikely the prospect of winning.

The arrival of the US Polaris submarine fleet in the Holy Loch in 1960 turned Glasgow into ground zero for any Soviet pre-emptive nuclear missile strike. It also triggered a massive anti-Polaris movement on Clydeside. A man of deeds as well as words, Morrison was drawn to the more libertarian and action-oriented Scottish Committee of 100, rather than the relatively passive, celebrity-and-politician-dominated CND. Walter's age, charisma and integrity, and the personal example he set to others, coupled with his fame as a rebel, gave him considerable status among the young militants on the committee. I have abiding memories of him standing single-handedly and fearlessly in Glasgow streets and at demonstrations around Scotland, surrounded by dozens of menacing and hostile opponents while arguing his case for direct action against the nuclear threat to Scotland and the world. His tenacity and fortitude in going out in all weathers to demonstrate in the most hostile locations, often alone, was truly inspiring.

Protest was a family affair around the Morrison household. Walter's wife, Agnes Lygate, whom he married in 1953, and neighbour in Govan, Eleanor Hinds, wife of writer Archie Hinds, both early feminists, were founders of

Women Against the Bomb and Youth against the Bomb. Betty Campbell, his later partner was, his constant support in the Corkerhill Community Council to which Morrison dedicated his life from 1976 to 2002.

On one occasion Morrison was setting up his tent on the foreshore of the Holy Loch, near Ardnadam pier which serviced the Polaris submarines and their support ships — it being illegal to camp on the land — when he was called over by someone waving to him from a large American car by the roadside. In the rear of the car were three men who addressed him by name, two from the Ministry of Defence's 'Psychological Warfare Group' in Dundee and the third an American of uncertain military or security provenance. They proceeded to warn Walter and his friends that they were out to get the so-called Scots Against War, a group who at the time were involved in publishing official secrets plus carrying out sabotage and other forms of direct action against military installations throughout Scotland. One of the MoD men pointed to the dark waters of the loch and told Walter that he was involved in a dangerous business and that it would be so easy for people like him to disappear, never to be found. Walter was a hard man, but this personal threat was something quite new and alarming to him.

A week after I was arrested in Spain in 1964, having been caught playing a part in a plot to assassinate the country's dictator, General Franco, Morrison hitchhiked from Glasgow to London to hold a fast and a picket the Spanish embassy — having first telephoned Scotland Yard to ask permission. No sooner had he settled down on the pavement when a police van drew up and four policemen jumped out, bundled him into the van and drove to an unidentified London police station. Instead of being

charged and taken to the police cells, he was escorted to what seemed like a large gym hall where three men sat at a table, one in police uniform and the other two in civvies. Morrison was then aggressively questioned about his relationship with me, about the Committee of 100 and again about the Scots Against War group, who had recently set fire to Ardnadam pier in the Holy Loch. Walter was an old hand at being arrested and locked up, but the sinister and surreal events of that night shook him up so badly that he resigned for a time from the Scottish Committee of 100.

After the Committee of 100 petered out a few years later, Morrison and his partner Betty Campbell became pivotal figures in setting up the Corkerhill Community Council which, among countless other campaigns for improved housing, safer roads, children's play parks, better people integration, successfully organized local resistance to the threat to the environment and community of Corkerhill from the M77 motorway, and the later Pollock Free State resistance camp. In fact, Corkerhill was the very first community in Glasgow to house the Vietnamese Boat People.

In 1998 when Morrison was at Buckingham Palace being awarded an MBE for his services to the community of Corkerhill, the queen's corgis had been running around the room unchecked, sniffing feet and generally intimidating everyone. He said to HM: 'You know, Ma'am, if those dogs were running around like that in Corkerhill where I come from, I'd shoot the lot of them.' He was joking, of course...

He is survived by his partner Betty Campbell, his daughter Leigh and son Grant.

Walter Morrison MBE, community activist, born March
20, 1924; died February 6, 2004.